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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NOUAKCHOTT 000451

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PREL PGOV KDEM MR PHUM

SUBJECT: MAURITANIA ELECTION CHRONICLES FOR JULY 12 --

POLITICAL NOMADISM

REF: NOUAKCHOTT 440

Classified By: Ambassador Mark Boulware for reasons 1.4 (c) and (d)

¶1. (SBU) Aziz organizes massive political rally: As promised last week on the campaign trail, presidential candidate Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz held a political rally in the Nouakchott neighborhood of Arafat on July 11. The event was widely publicized and Mattel cell phone users received an unsolicited SMS on July 10 announcing the time and location of the rally. According to LES reports, thousands attended -- some as Aziz supporters, others as mere spectators eager to see, as promised by Aziz, proof of Ahmed Ould Daddah and Messaoud Ould Boulkheir's corruption schemes. Some witnesses stated that many participants were young and not of legal voting age. A small helicopter overflew the gathering throwing Aziz posters and photographs, which the crowd originally mistook for ouguiya bills. Aziz appeared with his Ouled Bisbaa tribesman and powerful businessman Mohamed Ould Bouamatou, despite recent rumors of disagreements between them. As usual, Aziz harshly criticized his opponents and accused them of corruption -- he pointed fingers at Boulkheir for supposedly mismanaging 300 million UM (approximately \$1 million USD) in National Assembly funds and at Ould Daddah for squandering democratic opposition funds. He also identified UNAD president and FNDD member Abdel Koudous Abeidna as the mysterious Mauritanian businessman who supposedly traveled across the US gathering support from pro-Israel groups (reftel). Comment: Abeidna, a close Embassy contact, spent three months in France lobbying French politicians against the coup. Contrary to Aziz's statements, Abeidna did not set foot in the US. End comment. Nevertheless, he failed to provide concrete proof of any of these accusations and justified his broken promise by stating that his technical team had not been able to project the documents on stage. Surprisingly, for the first time since the beginning of the campaign, he refrained from criticizing his cousin Ely Ould Mohamed Vall. Rumors say Bouamatou, formerly close to Vall, has struck a deal with Vall to support him in case he moves on to the second round of elections and has requested that Aziz stops dragging his cousin's name in the mud in political rallies.

¶2. (SBU) TSA Tous Sauf Aziz -- Anyone But Aziz): In yet another sign of opposition unity against Aziz, the campaign directors for Vall, Ould Daddah, Ould Boulkheir issued a joint statement denouncing Aziz' campaign tactics and dismissal of the key political elements of the Dakar

Agreement. Candidate Ould Daddah (who had consistently denigrated President Abdallahi over the past ten months) came out with a statement praising the President for his resolute stand against the coup.

¶3. (SBU) The Smasside strike a deal with Daddah: According to local press reports and rumors, the Smasside tribe has promised to support RFD's Daddah in exchange for the appointment as prime minister of former SNIM director Mohamed Saled Ould Heyine. The press describes this alliance as "against nature," highlighting that Daddah's tribe and the Smasside have been long-time enemies. Comment: Director for the Arab Maghreb Mohamed Ould Mekhale called PolOff's attention today to the "strange" nature of alliances in this election, alluding to the Smasside-Daddah pact. He stated members of the same tribe are supporting different candidates and even allying with unexpected ones. Mekhale interprets this lack of tribal cohesiveness -- well-known Smasside elements are also behind Aziz and Boulkheir -- and unexpected alliances as "the beginning of the end of tribal politics." According to local press, this "political nomadism" leading to strange alliances was at the heart of President Abdallahi's fall.

¶4. (U) A campaign that revolves around money: Local press reports that the July 18 campaign is the first in Mauritanian history where money plays a central role. Never before have campaigns been so well financed -- the sight of politicians spending inordinate amounts of money on private planes and hotel rentals was unheard of. This money, the press warns, could also be used to buy votes. Many Mauritians regret

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that presidential candidates have not spent more time and effort developing their presidential platforms as opposed to engaging in "shows of force."

¶5. (SBU) U.S. Electoral Support: The Embassy launched an election awareness campaign July 11 through DoD MIST funding to the local NGO NEDWA. The effort repeats the well-received "Caravan of Hope" program fielded in the 2007 elections that had a direct impact in getting out the vote and reducing the percentage of spoiled ballots. Then, as now, the program will visit provincial capitals with an entertainment and information program giving candidate-neutral messages on the importance and mechanics of voting. The program is backed up by a series of radio and television spots. All products and messages were developed in close cooperation with the National Independent Electoral Commission.

¶6. (SBU) Logistical Challenges: In a July 12 meeting with the Ministry of Interior's Secretary General and the Ministry's election planning team, DCM was told that all the election materials for the July 18 election were received the evening of July 11 and are being distributed to district offices now. DCM had come with the offer of logistical support from a regionally-based AFRICOM plane. The Interior officials said the offer was too late for the first electoral round but that they would like to coordinate further for the second round. The Secretary General highlighted the difficulty of getting polling materials and personnel to some of Mauritania's remote locations and asked whether the U.S. could provide helicopters for that purpose (DCM regretted that would not be possible). The Secretary General stressed that his Ministry was under extreme political pressure to get things right under an extremely tight timeline and with significant funding gaps. He noted the Ministry had always been able to tabulate and release results within 24 hours of the election. With the logistical difficulties in this round, he worried they might not make it this time which, he added, "Will have everyone accusing us of trickery."

¶7. (C) Comment: The word of the day is "political nomadism." Newspapers are brimming with press releases and communiques from different tribal and interest groups across the country publicly announcing their allegiance to

candidates. Many who had already promised their support to Aziz for the June 6 election have shifted their support to other candidates stating that "their word was good for June 6 but not for the upcoming election; then was then and now is now." The campaign's intensity is increasing with accusations and insults flying left and right and candidates frantically traveling around the country to hold political rallies and gather votes in the interior. Ely Vall has distinguished himself for his more traditional politics -- he has been busy visiting renowned regional religious figures, known as cheikhs, to request their support and, as a result, the votes of all these learned men's loyal followers.

¶8. (C) Comment continued: Newspapers and websites are overflowing with polls attempting to guess which candidates will go to the second round. Aziz' strongest critics suggest Aziz will stage a first-round victory. They think Aziz, who will not accept to be defeated, will conduct a "coup d'etat" through the urns and commit massive fraud to ensure he is elected on the first round. "He cannot afford to go to a second round, compete against someone and loose," they argue.

These same people are convinced he will use military might to control the opposition after his fraudulent win. Other political analysts dismiss this possibility, stating it would bring civil war to Mauritania and that nobody, including the military, is willing to spill blood on behalf of Aziz. In any case, today, barely six days before the elections, everybody is afraid of Aziz's reaction if things do not go the way he planned, whether it is on July 18 or on August 1.  
End comment.

BOULWARE